

3rd Sunday of Lent, yr. B, Xavier church, Ex. 20, 1-3. 7-8. 12-17; Ps. 19; 1 Cor. 1, 22-25; John 2, 13-25

Pater Ward Biemans SJ

Dear brothers and sisters, when Jesus goes up to Jerusalem, He is full of zeal for his Father's house. He chases the tradesmen out of the Temple, since He wants the Temple to be a sacred place, suitable for prayer and worship. In a similar way, Moses was full of zeal when he came to his people with the two tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant with the ten commandments, or ten words written on it. When he comes back from the mountain, Moses discovers that the people had made a golden calf, were worshipping it and making sacrifices to it. He destroys the tablets of stone and throws the golden calf in the fire. But see how patient God is with his people: he urges Moses to climb the mountain once more and to write the words of the ten commandments on two other tablets.

What makes these ten words so important, not only for the Jewish people but also for us, Christians? Let us see what answer Jesus gives to the rich young man's question in St. Matthew's Gospel: 'Teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life?' Jesus answers first by pointing towards God as 'the One who is good'. Thus, He refers to the first out of the ten words. In the first word, God makes himself known by recalling his all-powerful loving, and liberating action in the history of the people he addresses: "I brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." God's first call and just demand is that we accept him and worship him.

The second word prescribes respect for the Lord's name. Respect for his name is an expression of the respect owed to the mystery of God himself and to the whole sacred reality it evokes.

The third commandment tells us to remember the sabbath day and to keep it holy. Now we are gathered here in church on a Saturday evening. For Christians, worship on Sundays or Saturday evenings are the fulfilment of the sabbath.

The institution of the Lord's Day also helps us to enjoy adequate rest and leisure and to cultivate our familial, cultural, social, and religious lives.

Going back to the encounter Jesus had with the rich young man, Jesus tells him in reply to his question what he should do to have eternal life: 'If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.' He then cites for his questioner the precepts

that concern love of neighbor: 'You shall not kill, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.' Finally, Jesus sums up these five commandments positively: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

Dear brothers and sisters, we haven't talked yet about the last two commandments from the book of Exodus, which we know as the ninth and tenth commandment. In the Catholic catechetical tradition, the ninth commandment forbids carnal lust as a goal in itself, without conjugal love. This commandment has to do with the purification of the heart. And remember, we can always start anew when we have fallen. Purity of heart is the precondition of the vision of God, as Jesus said in his sermon on the mount: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.'

The tenth commandment unfolds and completes the ninth. It forbids coveting another's goods. The tenth commandment requires that envy be banished from the human heart. The baptized person should struggle against it by exercising good will and even by rejoicing in the progress of our brother or sister in Christ. Thus, God, the Creator of us all, is glorified.

When we live according to these ten words, then Christ, the wisdom and power of God, becomes visible in our lives. In today's Gospel, the Jews turn to Jesus, saying, "What sign can you show us, that you can do this?" Jesus did not give them this sign openly, but with a parable of rebuilding the temple in three days. Now, a temple is a place where God resides. Since the Godhead resided in Christ's body, his body and soul are indeed God's temple. The resurrection of his body is the most wonderful sign the Gospel contains and a reason for us to repent and to trust in God's forgiveness. We may live in the joy of the coming of God's Kingdom, and we may cooperate with Him by bringing his joy to others. Amen.